

DECEMBER, 1870.

THE STREET-VENDERS OF NEW YORK.



THE TOOTH-POWDER MAN.

THERE is a certain prejudice extant in the world against peddlers. Those ancient and vagabond traders who tarried on their way to Egypt, and invested twenty pieces of silver in a kidnapped Israelitish youth, are not held in saintliest remembrance. Autolycus, the Bohemian rascal whom Shakespeare paints in such penitentiary colors, sang the praises of his wares and cut the purses of his customers with equal readiness, and then soliloquized,

VOL. I.—No. 2.—9

enraptured with his own exploits, "Ha, ha! what a fool honesty is!" Even in these modern days many a good and motherly housewife cherishes an unshaken and almost unchristian antipathy against the entire race of peddlers, accounting them intrusive and impertinent and dishonest, and laying I know not what other failings to their charge.

But the difference between the forest wolf and the village dog is scarcely greater than



between the vagrant country peddler, with his pack and staff, and the simple city vender, with his stock of fruits, candies, nuts, or cakes, ranged in a basket or spread on a stand, and with but little choice left save to wait with honest patience for the chinking coins that the swift current of passers-by tosses now and then upon his little commercial beach. The sidewalk dealers who make merchandise of toys or tooth-picks, photographs or flowers, knives or neck-ties, gloves or eye-glasses, balloons or sleeve-buttons, find extortion a losing game, and can only hope to arrest an occasional purchaser by the extraordinary cheapness of their wares. The deep-voiced "licensed venders," whose well-filled carts of fruit or vegetables stand along the curb-stone or slowly traverse the side-streets, are compelled by the keen rivalry of hundreds of fellow-venders to keep their charges within reasonable bounds, however suspiciously small their quart measures may sometimes appear. Furthermore, well-trained city servants do not trust these street purveyors beyond the kitchen door, and they thus escape the temptation that so easily besets their roving country cousins to "convey," as Ancient Pistol smoothly puts it. Even the newsboy, at once the least, the shrillest, and the keenest of the street-vending race, is so hedged about in these latter days with lodging-house comforts and good influences, that his conduct brings no discredit on his older and staidier *confrères* in the picayune traffic of the sidewalk.

Though the street-venders of New York are doubtless by nature quite as depraved as their fellow-beings, they have but little chance or enticement to go astray, and are often too old, too ignorant, or too care-worn to practise knavery. No one, with wit or will to play the rascal, ever stoops to the tedious *rôle* of sidewalk merchant, and the meagre profits of street-vending rarely permit indulgence in that strong drink which kindles such mischief in those a few steps higher in the social scale. Watching a cart or stand or basket from morning until nightfall, and often till long after, is lazy work, but it leaves these sentinels of the street little scope for Satan's proverbial mischief. Very seldom are they

profane, or even vituperative, and, save in the case of an occasional newsboy, I have never known them to quarrel or to break the peace in any way.

Only one instance ever came to my knowledge in which a New York street-vender was undeniably guilty of deliberate swindling. A worthy dame, living in the brown-stone suburb of Yorkville, was once persuaded to make the odd purchase of a canary-bird from a strolling dealer, who swore it was a charming singer. After a week's anxious waiting, its melodious lay suddenly came in the shape of an egg, which at once convicted the feathered innocent of unmusical femininity, and the unscrupulous seller of downright cheating. But such instances of trickery are too rare to blemish the reputation of the street-venders of New York for a fair share of honesty, as well as for commendable devotion to business.

Including the licensed venders, who are, as a rule, of the sterner sex, the masculine element largely preponderates among these curious camp-followers in the army of commerce. Nevertheless, women keep newsstands not infrequently, and little girls, ragged in dress but stout of heart, sell papers every day in Printing House Square, with the gallant approval of chivalrous newsboys; while scores of baskets and stands, and occasional carts, stocked with orderly heaps of fruit or piles of confectionery, are scattered along the more crowded sidewalks, and patiently tended by aged crones, forlorn and wrinkled, or by here and there a matron, slim and anxious-visaged or cheerful and burly-limbed, and once in a while by a younger and comelier dame with a baby in her arms. There are no jaunty and handsome damsels among these feminine dealers, and they are all too carelessly costumed and too old, ugly, or toil-worn to awaken special interest except by their quaint picturesqueness of aspect or surroundings, or by a certain air of humility and unconscious pathos which suggests a saddened and disastrous life.

Old and young are alike enlisted in the street-vending service, from the gray-haired grandsire who, upon a summer's afternoon, falls asleep beside his basket on the shady





"BISMARCK!"

side of Broadway, to the tiny news-girl scarce halfway to her teens, who flits with plaintive cry along the pavement until long after the curfew hour.

The Emerald Isle furnishes a large quota to the ranks of these street-merchants. Many of the shrewdest were born on American soil, while there are not a few Italians and other Europeans among them, with a sprinkling of Chinamen, and here and there a negro. The Chinese deal chiefly in pine-apple candy and in cigars, in which they monopolize the street trade. A negro newsboy would be as great a rarity in New York as a black swan; and very few of the African race venture to engage in ordinary street-vending; but there are many negro women among the mysterious "hot corn" sellers, whose strangely modulated midnight cry, echoing through the deserted streets, is a sound as unearthly and weird as any wild bird's scream.

A certain commercial shrewdness is not altogether wanting in the sidewalk commercial fraternity, especially among the younger vendors, who are quick to profit by a chance for extra sales. Fans and other summer wares come promptly into the street market as soon as the rising mercury touches the figures of the heated term. The news-dealer near St. Patrick's Cathedral, with an eye to pious patronage, stocks his stand on a pleasant Sunday morning with the latest issue of the *Catholic World*. When the war broke out last summer, between France and Prussia, ex-

citing at once the ire and the patriotism of the phlegmatic Teutons, photographs of Bismarck were speedily for sale in all the great German beer-gardens on the Bowery. And upon the afternoon of the eclipse of 1869, newsboys and bootblacks simultaneously forsook the "extra" and the brush, and devoted themselves to selling a brown and vitreous material, in small rectangular pieces, which the urchins, after many futile and comical attempts at nomenclature, concluded to call "'clip' glasses."

Besides the time passed in attention to his business, the street-dealer finds much leisure to spend in cloudy reverie, in tranquil chat with a neighbor, in poring over a book or paper, in smoking a soothing pipe, or in dozing. The newsboys are more gregarious and sportive, and the licensed vendors vary the tedium by long excursions in search of household buyers. But it must be confessed that the average existence of the New York street-vender is a somewhat monotonous and uneventful round, however much some of its features may strike the fancy or pique the interest of the curious student of human nature.

The most picturesque of city peddlers are the balloon men, and the most gipsy-like of the tribe is an old Frenchman who haunts Broadway near Union Square, and whose English vocabulary only includes, "Want one?" "Fifteen cent!" "No understand."



"'CLIP' GLASSES!"





THE BALLOON MAN.

He has a lean and wrinkled visage, gray eyes, a bristly tuft of beard upon his chin, and small silver rings in his ears. His attire is a fine linen shirt and a pair of brown trousers, held in place by a stout red cord twisted thrice around his waist and ending in a heavy tassel. Over his shoulder is strapped a black leather bag full of mysterious odds and ends. In slouched hat and loose shoes he shuffles along at a measured pace, with a stoop in his shoulders and a whistle in his mouth, a brown stick grasped in his right hand, and a bunch of stout threads tightly held in his left. These threads are all tied to one end of the stick, and to each is fastened a round red toy balloon, five or six inches in diameter. These float in a huge cluster like a colossal bunch of scarlet grapes or a flock of rosy soap-bubbles, much to the delight of children, and

somewhat to the curiosity of their elders. Half a dozen odd little shriveled reddish-brown pouches are attached to old Pierre's stick, and his whistle is simply a metallic mouth-piece, with which he blows up one of these pouches till it becomes a balloon, full of common air, that speedily escapes again with a small shriek, as if aggrieved at being forced into such uncomfortable quarters.

Fully half the toy-balloons sold in New York are made in Sullivan street, in a dingy little second-story front room, about twelve feet square. This contains a bed, a table, a stove, and all the smaller paraphernalia of a humble household, in addition to the simple apparatus of balloon manufacture. The maker is a Frenchman, with a fierce moustache and a jolly wife, whose favorite expletive is "Good glory!"



"Make *ballon* seventeen year in Paris, tree year in New York," says François. "Make two, tree hundred a day, sometime four hundred."

He shows a red wooden chest full of the little rubber pouches.

"Come from Paris, blow him up, you see."

And he takes a pair of bellows and inflates the limp and dingy little sack into a glossy scarlet sphere, ties the mouth with a cotton thread, and lets it go.

"Fall on the ground, you see. Must put gas in him."

Water, sulphuric acid, and strips of zinc are the materials used to make this gas. The balloons are filled one at a time, a long thread is wound around the mouth of each and securely fastened, and then they are anchored to the table with a tumbler, tied to the back of a chair, or allowed to rise and bump themselves along the ceiling. Three score of these ruby globes, all floating gracefully in the air, lend a rose-colored and picturesque charm even to this forlorn little room and its shabby inmates. A thin coat of liquid isinglass is applied with a brush, to keep the gas from slowly escaping, and when this dries the balloons are ready for the street.

"Four, six, eight men, all French, sell *ballon* now in New York," says François statistically, "and four men make him. I have had one time eleven men to sell *ballon* under me," he adds, and goes on plying his isinglass brush with a complacent air, suavely saying, "*Bon jour!*" as we pick our way from the little apartment.

Returning to Broadway, the seller of another toy straightway catches our eye. On a small camp-stool frame, covered with a piece of gay-colored carpeting, lie seven or eight little wooden clowns, negroes or Chinamen, six inches high, and dressed in white ruffs, blue or scarlet blouses with a gilt stripe, and short red or yellow trousers. Their arms are stiffly stretched out in front, and when they are placed on their heels they forthwith turn an imbecile somersault. They have lungs of some doubtful kind, and when set down smartly they utter a squeak strongly suggestive of a mouse in distress. This pleasing

noise is much aggravated by pulling their heels. The seller employs himself in making them caper and squeal, or in stalking up and down the sidewalk, with his arms folded, and the air of a man whom the world is not using fairly.

Near Prince street, on Broadway, is another toy man with a black beard and melancholy eyes. He sells canes and whips, card-board butterflies mounted on a pair of wheels, round fur hats which reveal a grenadier when lifted and extinguish him again when dropped, and comical little wooden bald-headed school-masters, dangling at the end of a cord, and spanking a stubborn pupil with unwearied patience.

Other toys often sold on the street are Blondin tops, that gyrate on a thread; round gilt bits of trumpery slightly resembling watches; dolls that ride a three-wheeled velocipede in a ring on the sidewalk; and small tin chanticleers, that have cannon-shaped tails or soldiers on their backs, and that utter an absurd little crow, if you blow in the cannon's mouth or through the soldier's cap. Small medallion



THE CHESTNUT MAN.



heads, made of soft rubber, with very black eyes, very red cheeks, and the most preposterous features, are sold by half a dozen young men, who stand for hours pinching the heads into still more ludicrous aspects, and whistling softly in a way to make the unsuspecting passer imagine that the hideous little gutta-percha visage is mysteriously possessed of fine vocal powers.

In the year of the Fremont campaign, an intelligent young Irishman tried to sell some old cents which had accidentally come into his possession, but the coin-dealer would not pay what the young man thought they were worth, and he resolved to offer them to the public himself. Accordingly, to the consternation of his friends, he at once established himself as the first street coin-vender in New York, believing that he could at least make enough to buy a loaf of bread every day, and a pound of beefsteak on Sunday. Fortune favored the young dealer, for the numismatic fever prevailed in 1857, and he surprised every one by clearing fifteen hundred dollars in eighteen months. Considering himself independently rich, he thereupon made a trip to the old country; but on his return he found such an abatement in the rage for coin-collecting, that since then he has only made a modest living as a street-vender of rare, curious, and ancient currency. For many years he stood at the corner of Broadway and Chambers streets, but last summer he migrated and became a Wall street dealer!

He is a man of moderate stature, quiet manner, and pleasant countenance, with short brown beard and moustache, comfortable attire, and a narrow green necktie embroidered with white silk. His coins are fastened in rows with copper tacks upon three small boards, which are covered with white paper, and suspended by loops of twine to the tips of the iron railing near the Treasury Building. There are American coins on one of these boards, European coins on the second, and small silver Roman coins on the third, besides various medals and tokens in a square red, wooden, cord-suspended box, which also contains a little pile of dingy old paper "Continental money," varying in denomination from three pence to eighty dollars, and most of it

made in Pennsylvania, and inscribed with the ominous warning, "To counterfeit is death."

The highest price this vender ever received was paid for a cent of 1799, which brought forty-five dollars on account of its perfectness and rarity. He sold some time ago an album, containing eighteen hundred kinds of postage-stamps, for three hundred and seventy-five dollars, and, in fact, drives a brisker trade of late in stamps than in coins. He also has for sale a very unique collection of "war envelopes," embellished with an infinite variety of patriotic designs. But these sell slowly, and "selling coins," he says, "is just like fishing; you never know when you will have a bite. Some days I don't get a dollar, and again I take fifty dollars in a single afternoon."

The sale of pictures is a noteworthy branch of street trade. The photograph vender has a rack of pink tapes tacked along a large board frame, studded with sun-portraits of the great, the famous, and the notorious—George Washington and Queen Victoria, General Grant and Ida Lewis, the last murderer, and Lydia Thompson, and a thousand more of the worthies and unworthies of the past and present. A dealer near the Custom House spreads his stock of gay French chromos on the railing and the sidewalk, and a youthful Broadway vender, pipe in mouth, patiently watches a pile of steel engravings, placarded as "racing, religious, landscapes, and other scenes."

The most curious street flower-stand in New York is kept on one of the Broadway corners near Wallack's Theatre, by a Union soldier, who, at Atlanta, stopped a Southern bullet with his arm. It is a dark-green, six foot structure, with four small curved legs, meeting in an upright standard, which branches again in two arms, supporting an oval tin-sided box, about a yard long and four inches deep. Through the bottom of this the standard pushes its way three feet into the air, and spreads out in a dozen short, round, hollow branches of tin, inclined upwards at an acute angle. The ex-volunteer is a short, well-made, moustached individual, with black eyes, an intelligent face, and farmer-like attire. He has a little cottage and garden at Union Hill, where he lives with his wife and two babies.



Every pleasant summer afternoon he crosses the Jersey ferry, about five o'clock, with an immense square basket, which looks as if it might hold a giant's champagne bottles. Upon reaching his post, he takes the stand from a neighboring saloon, whose good-natured proprietor allows it storage during the day, and proceeds to make it blossom like the rose, by inserting a plump bouquet in a stiff white paper jacket into each of the hollow arms, and ranging a score or two of smaller nosegays in a row against the tin rim of the oval box. This done, he takes a sprig of evergreen and sprinkles the flowers with sparkling water-drops from a prosaic tin pail, unfolds his favorite evening paper, and seats himself to wait, often till midnight, for flower purchasers enough to exhaust his stock. This nocturnal waiting is no new experience for him, for he is a veteran street florist, and sold flowers on Broadway when Fillmore was President. Twenty years ago he worked at Niblo's Garden, and the flower-boy's profits inspired him with such a floral ambition that he has been a street florist ever since, save during three years of service in the army, including Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, and other well-fought fields.

"Times are hard now," he says, regretfully, "and I can hardly make my expenses. 'Tain't like the old days at Niblo's, when there was plenty of gold and silver coin around, and you sold a dozen bouquets where you can't sell one now. Yes," he continues, "there are a good many street florists on Broadway now—Germans, mostly. They spoil the trade, too—live on 'mahogany bread,' as I call it, and a glass of lager, and sell at half-price, and make money at that."

"Do all the street florists raise their own flowers?"

"Most of 'em, except the little girls. They buy 'em of me or other dealers. They make more money than I do, too."

"How is that?"

"Why, when business is dull, I sell 'em for five cents such a little bouquet as this,"—showing one of eight or ten flowers, with a fringe of geranium leaves—"and they just take it to pieces, and make three or four



THE FLOWER-GIRL AT THE ASTOR HOUSE.

little button-hole bouquets, and sell 'em for ten cents a-piece."

"Some of the dealers come early in the afternoon and make their bouquets on the street?"

"Oh, yes; 'specially down by the Astor House, where they keep 'em in glass cases, mostly, the sun is so hot. Sometimes they have a rustic frame to stick 'em in, or a stand like this, with no middle-piece, and a wire rim instead of tin."

"Or they carry them on a board full of small holes?"

"Yes; a little girl mostly carries bouquets in her hand at first, or gets a piece of stiff paste-board, and punches holes through it with a stick; but when she gets richer she buys a bit of board with two or three rows of holes through it."

"Do you sell flowers here in winter?"

"Oh, no, it's too cold. Even if you kept 'em in a glass case they'd turn black most days if you just took 'em out to show. I keep a place in-doors in winter. The best time to sell flowers on the street is in the fall, when the rich people that buy 'em have just got home from the country, and before the frost comes."

As we pass on, thanking our florist for his courtesy, two brown-faced, bare-footed little girls come skipping along, and chattering Italian volubly, one with a small basket on her



arm, and each carrying a little flower-board full of tiny bouquets. A newsboy brushes by them with a rude push. The taller of the two girls looks incensed. The boy grins, and the girl, handing her board to her companion, clenches her little fist and aims a blow at the discourteous urchin, who returns it with a stroke that sends her basket flying, and scatters its leafy contents on the walk. Nothing daunted, the small Amazon launches a sudden kick, which so smites and discomfits her opponent that he retreats in disorder, leaving the frowning victor to pick up her basket, while the smaller girl chuckles gleefully at the result of the fray.

The stroller down Broadway upon a pleasant afternoon can scarcely fail to observe the "resurrection plant" vender, the only dealer of his kind in New York. He is a well-built man of more than medium size, with a sun-tanned visage and iron-gray hair and moustache, and wears a green coat, a black velvet waistcoat, and a stiff straw hat with a black stripe in the brim. His botanical marvels are displayed in an oblong basket, two feet long and twelve inches deep, and surmounted by a placard inscribed:—

*"Resurrection Plant, or Siempre Vive, from Lower California. This beautiful plant will turn from brown to green in twelve hours after put in water."*

The basket is filled with small egg-shaped

bunches of forlorn vegetation: dry roots and faded leaves, apparently withered to utter lifelessness. But here is one of them in a shallow dish, placed on a little shelf at one end of the basket. The roots are immersed in water, and the broad white plate is almost hidden beneath the fresh and spreading clusters of green and fern-like leaves. These strange plants, which may be dried and revived again at pleasure, rarely or never blossom in this part of the world, but on their native and barren mountain-tops they are said to bloom once a year, sending up short and slender stems tipped with clusters of white or scarlet flowers. The vender has sold thousands of these curiosities on Broadway during the last two years—sometimes a hundred in a single day; but lately he is satisfied if he sells a dozen a day, at thirty-five cents a-piece. He also occasionally vends a very extraordinary oval green leaf, about four inches long, with a purple stem and slightly indented edges. Upon hanging this in a shady place, a small green air-plant, with a bunch of white fibrous roots, will spring from each little indentation, grow rapidly, and, if transplanted to a pot of earth, will produce a single small scarlet four-leaved flower.

Very near Union Square is a certain little fruit-stand, well worthy passing note, although it is one of the rudest and frailest of its sort. A low and narrow table, made of brown and

unplaned boards, with notches sawed in the end pieces, to make it stand more firmly; a covering of thick and dingy paper spread over its rough surface; unsavory little heaps of peaches upon two or three shallow tins, such as housewives bake apples in; the whole shaded by an old, ragged, and weather-beaten umbrella lashed to a bit of stick nailed upright to the end of the stand. This is placed on the sidewalk's edge, and close to it is a still smaller contrivance, which may be opened and shut like the frame of a camp-stool, and



THE BLIND SHOE-STRING WOMAN.



which bears a little wooden tray heaped with a small half-bushel of hard green apples. Bits of card-board with the figures 1, 2, and 3, rudely scratched on them in pencil, indicate the prices of these decidedly unattractive specimens of Pomona's gifts.

A single well-directed kick would throw fruit and all into the middle of the street, and a half-eagle would pay for the damage done. And yet from the profits of this little stand a poor Italian, who cannot speak a word of English except the convenient monosyllable, "Yes," has supported himself, his wife, and seven little children for nearly a year. The boy, who keeps the stand in his father's absence, leans against the lamp-post, basking in the sunshine.

He wears a black velvet cap, a thick dark jacket and trousers, and heavy boots, more battered than polished; his short black hair, crisp and curling, and his full, good-natured face, with swarthy cheeks and long eyelashes, indicate his parentage; but he speaks very good English, for his father sent him to this country to spy out the land more than two years ago.

He is shy of talking; but if you buy peaches he will answer questions, and he is soon enticed into telling that he is fourteen years of age, and the oldest of three brothers and four sisters, all of whom live with their parents in a single second-story room in Elizabeth street. Their Italian home was in the country, in view of a distant mountain, "with fire on top of it," and the father kept a small store, and

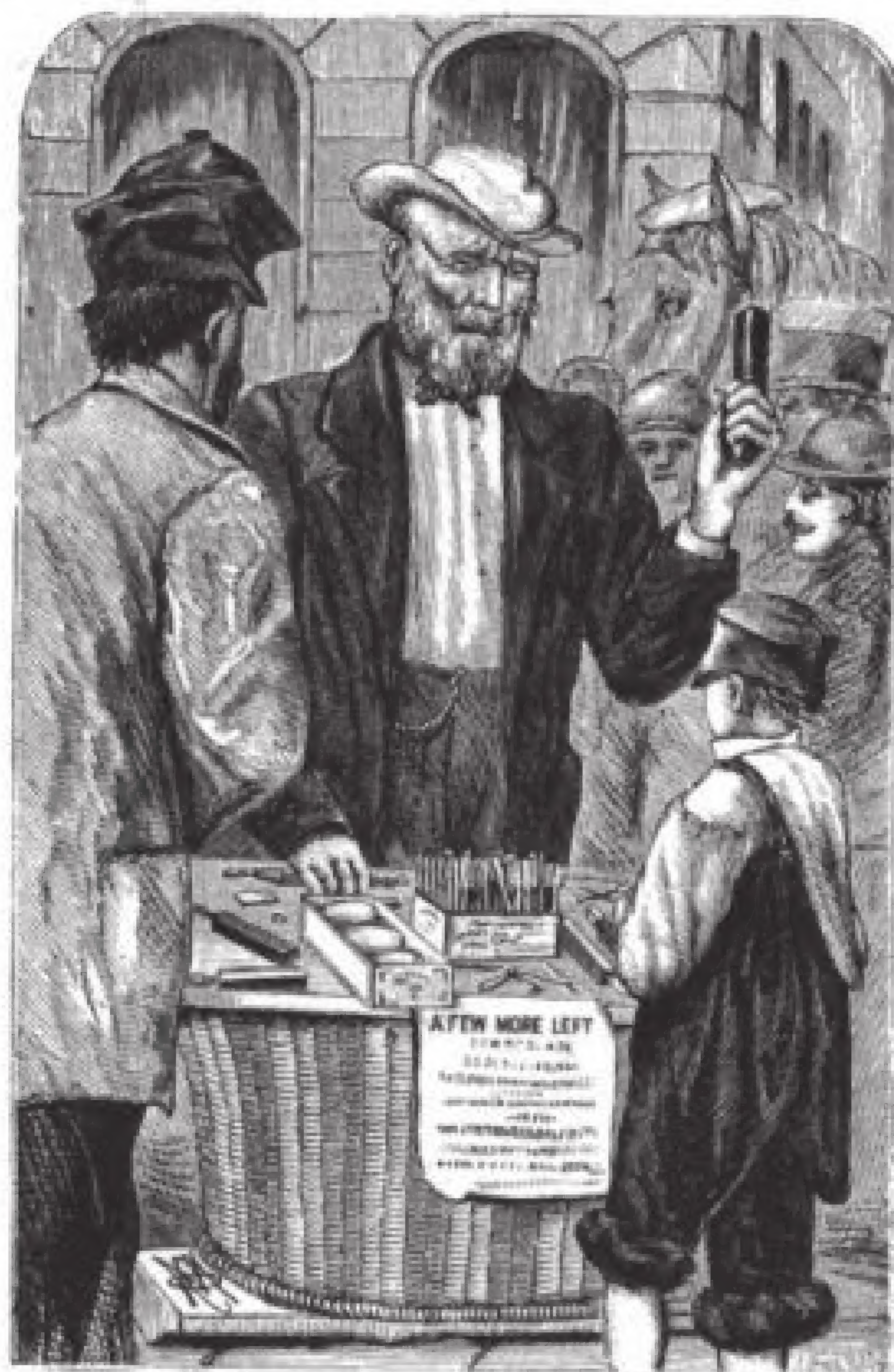


A SOUTH STREET MERCHANT.

sold coffee and spices. But he could not find food for his houseful of little olive branches, and so he came to this country "two or three months before last winter," as the boy oddly phrases it. And ever since he has sold apples, and peaches, and chestnuts, and candies in the streets of the strange city, and gained a more comfortable living for his family from the little stand in free America than from the larger store in sunny Italy.

Another humble alien who fares better here than in his native land is the Chinese candy vender. This brown-faced Asiatic discards his national peculiarities and appears upon the street in ordinary American attire, with his thick black hair cut Christianly short instead of dangling in a long braided cue. His stand is a low frame supporting a wooden





"A FEW MORE LEFT OF THE SAME SORT."

tray with a ragged zinc lining. On it rest two huge round cakes of candy, one white as snow, one yellow as cream, and both smeared over the top with a hard scarlet coating. A stout black-handled, broken-bladed carving-knife and a short heavy hammer serve for breaking these cakes into small angular fragments, about the size of a cubic inch. These pieces fill two tins and half a dozen small cone-shaped bags of brown paper. One cent a piece, or five cents a bag, is the tariff of prices.

"What do you call this?" we inquire.

"Pine-apple candy," is the prompt reply, for our Chinese friend has been here nearly five years and has learned to speak very fair English.

He further tells us that this candy, which he was taught to make in China, is manufactured from water and white or brown sugar, boiled and stirred thoroughly, seasoned with "pine-apple water from a doctor's store," cooled in tin pans in twelve-pound cakes, and coated with the last of the melted sugar, tintured with cochineal. We taste and find

the flavor very pleasant, which seems to be the opinion of others, for the purchasers are many. The smiling vender keeps his stand scrupulously clean with a wet cloth, which he politely offers us to wipe our sticky fingers on, and we come away with an improved opinion of John Chinaman's courtesy and neatness.

The most renowned street-vender in New York, or in the world, is Henry Smith, the "Razor-Strop Man" of Nassau street. Born in England, six months after Waterloo, his youth was roving and dissipated, and his devotion to drink gained him the *sobriquet* of "Old Soaker" before he was twenty-one. Signing the abstinence pledge for a month, and then for life, he became a good husband, an industrious man, and an ardent temperance advocate. In 1842 he sailed in the *Ontario* for America. Landing in New York, he soon began to sell razor-strops, and his street speeches were such droll, witty, and sensible mixtures of prose and poetry, that in three months he made himself the prince of peddlers. His sayings were chronicled in the papers, his portrait was published in the *Sunday Atlas*, and he even appeared for seven nights at the Olympic Theatre in Mitchell's play of the "Razor-Strop Man." His fame rapidly spread, and he made the tour of the Union, teaching temperance and selling his strops, until his characteristic saying, "*A few more left of the same sort*," became a "household word."

He achieved a fortune in a few years; but the spirit of speculation seized him, and the crisis of 1857 swept away his last dollar. With unshaken courage and a fresh basket of strops he began life anew, visited his native England, and won much reputation as a "genuine Yankee peddler." Returning to America, the war found him at Rochester, where he enlisted in a volunteer regiment. In his left leg he still carries a Gettysburg musket-ball. When told that it might be necessary to amputate the limb, he replied, "Well, I suppose I can afford to lose it, as I shall still have one more left of the same sort!" The leg was saved, but the wound disabled him and compelled his return to Rochester, where he served till after the close of the war as recruiting-sergeant,



and in the soldiers' hospital. With a purse from the city, a letter of thanks from the Mayor, and a Zouave uniform from his regiment, the veteran vender returned again to New York and became once more the "Razor-Strop Man" of Nassau street.

Age has whitened his close-cut hair and moustache, and the short growth on his bronzed cheek and chin; and his witty old-time speeches no longer gather crowds of laughing buyers. But his eye still twinkles with kindly shrewdness behind his gold-rimmed spectacles, and his softly spoken, "Here you are, young man!" is often the prelude to a sensible and genial preachment of temperance and the many virtues of the strops, razors, knives, and other wares that overflow his red, white and blue striped "first national basket."

The observant stroller along the highways and byways of the metropolis cannot fail to notice many a street-vender with something curious or amusing in aspect or costume, in the cry that he utters, in the thing that he sells, or in the cart, stand, or other contrivance that contains his wares. Here is a man holding a submissive urchin's nose with tenacious grip, scouring the youngster's teeth with vigorous brush, and proclaiming all the time with persuasive voice the virtues of his mar-



"SODA WATER—5 CENTS A GLASS."

vellous dentifrice. There is a sleepy foreigner selling strong-scented "Tonka Vanilla Mexican" beans out of a square black box, which reposes on a blue tripod with slender iron legs, each ending in a hoof. Here a female Falstaff, with blue bonnet-strings and a ragged, royal purple dress, trimmed with black velvet, vends suspicious cakes and pies, soggy yellow buns, and frightful red tarts, from a stand with a newspaper for a table-cloth, and a green-flowered shade above to shield it from the sun. There a wrinkled old woman in a green sun-bonnet yawns fearfully, takes a pinch of snuff, and then, with a brush of paper strips tied to a stick, drives away the flies from her little sweetmeat-stand, with its jars and boxes and heaps of many-colored confectionery, sticks and caramels and lozenges, and round, rough cakes, red, white, or yellow, of a cocoa-nut sweet-stuff peculiarly characteristic of New York candy-stands. Here is a man with a roll of soft yellow chamois-skins, and a string of still softer sponges; and there is an old woman with a basket of shelled walnuts and diminutive ginger-cakes. Here is a vender of ice-cream in tiny white goblets, which the young barbarians of the street speedily empty with their little red tongues; and there is an enterprising dealer regaling thirsty purchasers with "ice-water, one cent a glass." Here is an old man calmly compounding red lemonade in a huge tin pan; and yonder is a soda-water stand with its green marble urn, its company of inverted glasses, and its array of richly colored syrups in bottles generously large. Here is a basket of rough-coated pine-apples, and a burly woman with gold ear-rings converting the imperfect ones into piles of juicy slices, which a bit of ice keeps cool and fresh. There is a long stand with a green heap of uncut water-melons and a tempting array of red-fleshed, black-seeded halves and quarters. Here is a poor woman sitting on the church steps with a baby in her arms and two little ones crouching at her feet, mutely asking all who pass to buy a box of matches or a pair of shoe-laces at a charitable price. And there is an old blind man with tight-shut eyes, sitting in a broken chair, with a tedious doggerel appeal framed and hanging on his breast, and a box of wretched cigars in his lap, awaiting



a pitying purchaser. Here is the stencil plate-cutler, his little stand curtained with much-marked handkerchiefs; and there is the street cutter, with a troop of open many-bladed knives sticking upright in the bottom of his tray. Here is a little girl slipping a long file of penny ballads behind two stout cords stretched along an iron railing, and across the street is a dazzling array of tinware spread out on the sidewalk, as a net for purchasers. Here is a lad with half a dozen hammers for sale, and there is another with a handful of combs. Here is a yellow-whiskered man selling bunches of quill tooth-picks and Russian cigarettes out of a green box, and there is a black-moustached fellow with an overflowing stock of gay neck-ties and knots. Here is a street optician with steel-rimmed spectacles, or a cheap jewelry-stand with jet ear-rings and breast-pins and coral sleeve-buttons, all made of glass; and there is a street clothing-store with gloves and handkerchiefs, stockings, suspenders, and other kindred wares. Here is a news-stand shaded by a red-fringed and white and blue striped awning, and stocked with the day's papers, the month's magazines, and a pictorial array of police gazettes and



NEWS-STAND.

illustrated weeklies, slipped under cords or weighted with fragments of marble to keep them from blowing away. Yonder is a mob of ragged newsboys, racing and shouting around the office of an evening journal, and shaking the last edition in the face of every passer. Here is a little newsgirl with half her long black hair flying loose, devouring an apple, and exclaiming lustily between the mouthfuls, "Extra *Commercial*! Defeat of the French!" Yonder is another bare-headed lassie, leaping nimbly on the step of a passing street-car, with the cry, "Fourth German!" meaning "fourth" edition of the "*German*" *News*. Here is a licensed vender in a yellow cart, full of water-melons, going one way, and there is another vender in a green cart, full of musk-melons, travelling in the opposite direction, both uttering discordant shouts scarcely more intelligible than the strange street-cry which once awakened at a hotel a certain husband who positively declared that it was "Lager beer!" while his wife as stoutly affirmed that it was "Lozenges!" and it proved upon inquiry to be "Glass put in!" These venders sell all kinds of fruits and vegetables, fish in their season, fowls at Christmas and Thanksgiving, and I have even known them to vend hats and other



"FOURTH GERMAN!"



out-of-the-way wares. The humbler class use a two-wheeled cart pushed by hand, while the richer ones indulge in a four-wheeled chariot and a fiery steed.

The three finest out-door stands in New York are at the junction of Wall and Nassau streets, on the broad stone sidewalk in front of Jay Cooke's banking-house. They are all neatly roofed, corniced, and painted, and one is actually panelled and grained to imitate black walnut. Each has a counter and a door, and at the first French candy and tobacco are sold, while tarts and cakes, sandwiches and pies are vended at the other two, ice-cold soda water being the beverage at the second, and smoking hot coffee at the last.

Nassau street is a favorite haunt for street vendors of all kinds, including one thrifty fellow

who rejoices in the neatest of four-wheeled box-carts, with a spreading fruit-laden top, and red stars painted on the sides; and another whose huge square basket has a door behind and space enough within to hold at least a dozen bushels. In Printing House Square is a curious colony of venders, among whom the principal figures are a helpless genius who whittles with his toes, and an old one-handed peanut merchant with a lavishly heaped cart, rows of nut-filled tin cups, and a black sheet-iron "roaster" with a cone-shaped chimney.

Before we leave the Square, let us stop a minute here in one of the sheltering doorways of the *Tribune* Building. Observe that large basket, thick-woven of small straw-colored reeds, and shaped like an inverted truncated cone, oval instead of round. It is twenty inches deep and nearly three feet long, and



A SCENE IN PRINTING-HOUSE SQUARE.



would make a charming cradle if it had rockers instead of the two stout handles at each end, one on the edge, and the other halfway down. It has a cunning little oblong door behind, and a wicker shelf, fitting snugly across it near the edges, and resting on a woven ridge, converts it into an admirable fruit-tray, with a brown paper lining nearly hidden under a newspaper, one loose corner of which flutters in the breeze. A couple of bananas and a score of rosy-cheeked peaches are fenced off by a thin and narrow strip of board from two piles of juicy pears, separated by a paper bag folded lengthwise. Small squares of pasteboard, marked in purple ink with the modest numerals, 1, 2, and 3, surmount the piles and denote the prices.

This basket, one of half a dozen standing in sight along the outer edge of the sidewalk, is watched by a little girl, a rosy-faced maid with brown hair and smiling eyes. She wears a green dress spotted with tiny pink flowers, and a little black silk apron. A small square hood of white worsted, with red edges and long woven strings, covers her short, wavy locks, and her round bare legs appear between the hem of her dress and the tops of her black and threadbare shoes. She is dusting the fuzz off the peaches with a stiff, red-handled whisk-broom, and every now and then she makes a raid on half a dozen flies that are buzzing impertinently about, and strikes a vicious little blow at the biggest of the winged marauders.

But the sun shines too hot for so much exertion, and pretty soon she crouches down on the stone flags in the shade of the round red ventilator that stands on the corner like a huge lamp-post, nestles up against it, and crosses her legs like a Turk or a diminutive tailor. The glare of the smooth, stone sidewalk makes her scowl till her round face is full of wrinkles, and her little red lips move as if she were humming a tune to herself. Suddenly she dives into a large pocket tied under her apron and brings out a handful of coins, which she eyes approvingly and makes a feint of counting. At intervals she softly exclaims, as if afraid of making too much noise, "Penny a-piece ! bananas and peaches !"

Here comes a small and chubby-fisted fellow

who grapples with the biggest peach in the basket, while his bearded papa smiles and drops a cent in its place. The little girl jumps quickly up, pockets the coin, and picks up another jerked on the ground by an office-boy in his shirt-sleeves, who snatches up a pear, thrusts it into his mouth and holds it there, while his forefinger travels post-haste through the pockets of his waistcoat in search of a stray two-cent piece. The next purchaser is a deliberate gentleman with a cane and a gray moustache. Carefully extracting a new ten-cent stamp from his porte-monnaie, he puts three choice pears in his pocket, picks out the soundest peach, and places the money in the outstretched palm of the little seller, whose eyes snap with delight at such a wholesale transaction.

Then the crowd rushes by once more without even glancing at the fruit, and the girl drops down again in the shade, but suddenly springs briskly up and commences to chatter volubly to a short stout woman who is evidently the mistress of the basket. The newcomer wears a square red-and-white hood, a little plaid shawl around her neck, and a ragged calico dress looped up over a dingy striped skirt. She has brought a bit of bread and meat in a paper, and the little girl, after giving account of her stewardship, falls to munching as busily as the sailor's wife in *Macbeth*, while the woman takes her stand on the street-side of the basket, routs the flies with the broom, gives the peaches a whisk, straightens up the price-cards, promotes a couple of pears from the two-cent to the three-cent pile, puts the nicest ones on top with the nicest side in view and all the stems sticking up, and then sets one arm akimbo, grasps the broom in the other hand, and trusts to Providence for customers enough to sweep away the last of her fruit before nightfall.

If you ask you will find that her husband is a licensed vender, who stocks his cart and his wife's basket at the same time, while the girl is her little English niece, fresh from London, where she went to school "some little times ;" but here she helps her aunt to sell until her widowed mother can make a new home, and give her little Mary another chance to learn to read.



We stroll on again past a score of baskets and stands. The summer afternoon is growing late. St. Paul's clock has struck six, and the slant rays of the sun are burnishing the cupola of the City Hall. A stream of people, homeward bound, begins to flow along the sidewalks, and the horse-cars are rattling by, loaded to the steps. Just at the junction where one busy thoroughfare meets the other, and adds its quota to the hurrying crowd, a licensed vender has intrenched himself. The two streets unite in an angle as sharp as the pointed tip of the letter V, and the shrewd dealer has backed his four-wheeled, peach-loaded cart so close to the apex of this angle that it stands within arm's length of the passers on either sidewalk.

The horse, with an air of tranquil indifference to surrounding things, switches his tail occasionally or stamps his iron-bound hoofs upon the flinty pavement, to drive away the

flies that persist in promenading along his sleek gray sides. His harness is unpatched, and he has the air of a beast to whom a measure of oats is by no means an unknown luxury. There is no need of tying him, for the thought of running away never enters his head, and the ends of the reins lie, with a little black whip, upon the loose straw in the bottom of the wagon.

This vehicle is painted green, and, though well worn, is neatly and strongly made. Upon the side appear the words "Licensed Vender" in small white letters, and underneath is the number of the cart, which is up among the five hundreds. The springs are good, the box is shallow, and the tail-board lets down with a couple of hinges. There is a wooden seat, with a bit of sheepskin for a cushion.

In the back end of the cart the peaches are heaped up in a pile of four or five bushels



"HERE YOU ARE, NICE FRESH FISH."



They are of medium size, plump and ripe, juicy and fresh, and reasonably sound, for they reached the city this morning, and have just been poured out of the boxes in which they made the trip from Delaware. Behind this pile, sitting on his heels in the bottom of the cart, with a small wooden measure between his knees, is a young fellow of eighteen, with a Scotch cap on his head, a white handkerchief knotted around his neck, and the sleeves of his red patched flannel shirt rolled up to his elbows.

On the seat, with their backs to the horse, are two lads, with faded check shirts and prodigious lungs. About thrice a minute one of them cries, at the top of his voice,

"Pe-e-e-aches ! Pe-eaches ! Fi-i-i-ive cents a quart !"

To keep up this cry costs the poor little fellow such vocal exertion, that a great cord in the side of his neck starts out on the smooth surface when he opens his mouth, and disappears again when the sound ceases. His eyes glisten as if the tears were starting, and he almost gasps for breath after each effort. The other lad contents himself with throwing in an occasional cry, by way of relieving his more zealous companion.

Upon the sidewalk stands the vender himself, a slim, sun-burnt young man, with a smooth face, a stiff round-topped hat, a decent pair of boots, a dark coat, and gray trousers with a black stripe. He dispenses with the vanities of waistcoat and neck-tie, but there is nothing vicious or repulsive in his appearance. Two other young men, with moustaches and straw hats, one on the sidewalk and the other on the seat, are quietly busy folding squares of rustling yellow wrapping paper into conical horns of plenty. The tip of each of these is thrust into the mouth of its predecessor, and the little stacks thus made are placed in the bottom of the cart within easy reach of the vender.

Peaches are selling in the markets for twenty cents a quart, and the cry of the juvenile Stentor in the check shirt attracts so many buyers that the fellow on his knees can scarcely fill his measure fast enough. Grasping it with both hands, he shoves it into the pile, scoops it full, adds two or three

peaches with his hand to heap it up, and speedily empties it into the cone-shaped bag held by the vender, who puts in one more from the pile, hastily folds down the top of the paper, and jams the parcel into the hands of the purchaser, whose money is speedily tossed into the old cigar-box that serves as a till.

All kinds of people buy. The clerk marches away with a paper of peaches under his arm, and the school-boy walks off emptying his cornucopiæ as he goes. Old women carry the fruit away with trembling hands, and shop-girls stop their chattering long enough to fill their reticules. Patrick, with a short pipe in his mouth and a dinner-pail on his arm, buys a couple of quarts for Bridget and the "childer," and Hans takes home a paper-bag full to his blue-eyed wife and chubby babies.

So brisk is the business, that a young chap with red hair and a roguish face makes bold, without waiting for an invitation, to climb up on the wheel and lend a helping hand. Pitching his voice on the topmost key, he sings out, with a very laughable intonation,

"'E-e-ere you are ! Delaware peaches, nice 'n' ripe ! o-o-o-only five cents a bushel !"

Now and then, by way of recompense, he demurely allows himself to indulge in a peach or two, and throws one of the stones within an inch of the nose of a short-sighted German gentleman, who looks daggers at the grinning youth.

Presently the business slackens, and the vender takes up the cry in a hoarse, bass voice, "Delaware peaches ! five cents a quart !"

The red-shirted individual in the devout attitude chimes in with the same chorus, and the pile continues to grow rapidly less. But it is long after dark before the last are sold. The rest of the party go away, leaving the vender to light a flaring oil lamp, let down the tail-board of his cart, lean idly against it, and wait with patience for tardy buyers. The hours pass slowly. The gas-lights flicker along the pavement. A policeman swings his club on the opposite corner, and listens to the noises of rude revelry from a dozen concert saloons. The pile of peaches grows smaller and smaller, and diminishes at last to a single handful, which the tired vender gives to a



belated newsboy with pinched face and wistful look, and then, extinguishing his lamp, he jumps into the cart, seizes the reins, and

drives briskly away, hoofs and wheels clattering noisily along the deserted street until the sound dies away in a distant echo.





FEBRUARY, 1871.

THE NEW YORK MERCANTILE LIBRARY.



THE ANNUAL ELECTION—SCENE AT THE POLLS.

THE NEW YORK MERCANTILE LIBRARY is a remarkable example of a large and valuable institution, which combines all the principal features of a circulating library and a permanent collection for purposes of study and reference. It is remarkable, not only because it fulfills so well these double functions, which are not often successfully united, but also because it has built itself up by degrees without either endowment or State aid, is entirely self-supporting, and was founded and has always been managed by young men who have neither special aptitude for literary pursuits, nor much experience in any kind of

business. It is in fact the creation of merchants' clerks, who can spare only a few hours in the week from their desks and counters, and have never had much leisure to devote to any kind of books except day-books and ledgers. It has been in existence just fifty years. During that time it has had, like most other things, its seasons of good and bad fortune; but it has never been in very serious difficulties; for a long while past it has been uninterruptedly prosperous, and to-day it is the fourth in size of the libraries of this country, and the largest lending-library in America.



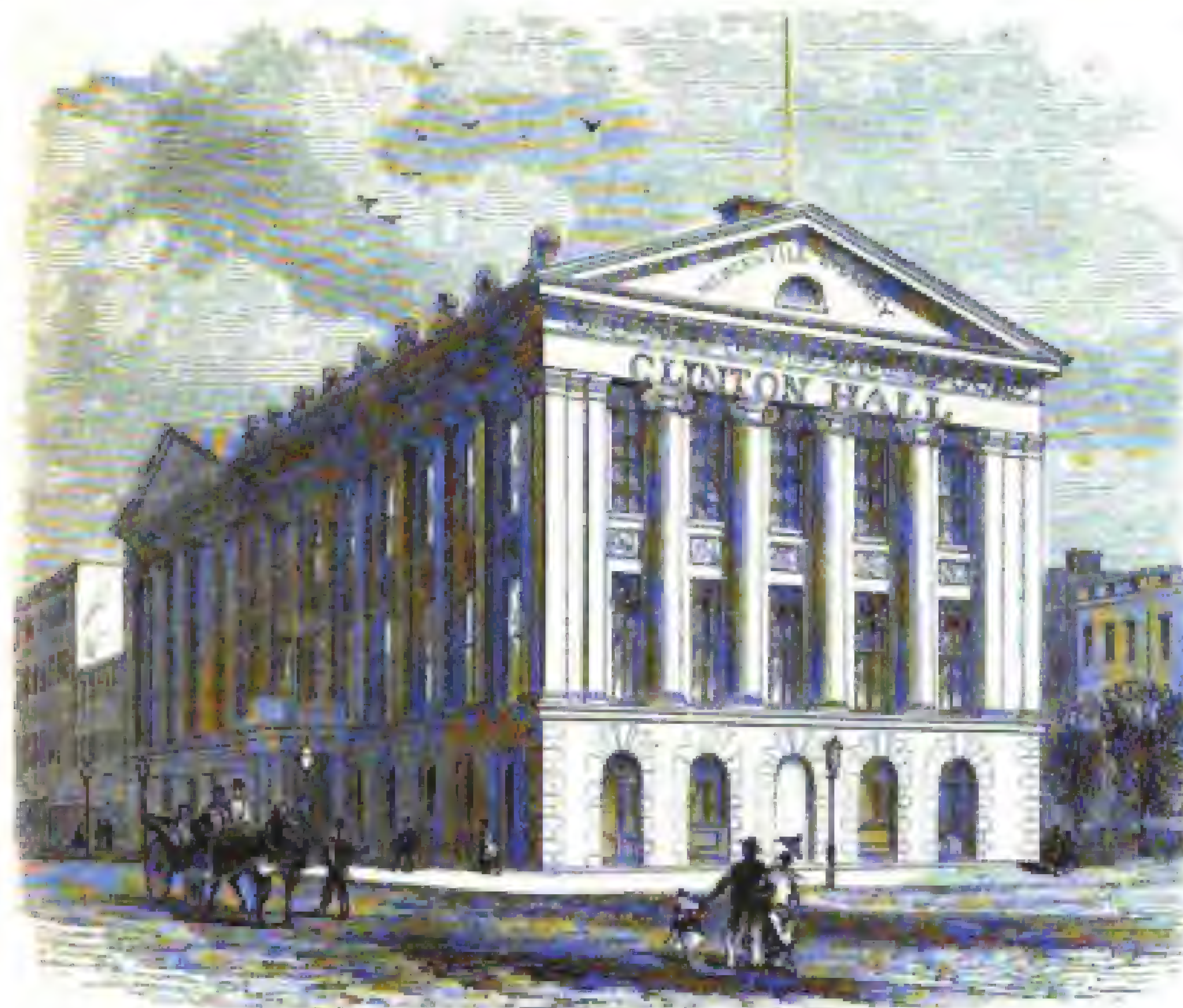
The real founder of the New York Mercantile Library was William Wood, a native of Boston, who devoted a great deal of time and money to the establishment of institutions for the benefit of clerks and apprentices, sailors, prisoners, and literary societies, and is credited by Lord Brougham, with first developing and putting to practical use the plans devised by Franklin for the creation of lending-libraries. Mr. Wood had been a dealer in glass and earthenware in Boston about the beginning of the century, and afterward did business in London. He founded a library for clerks in Liverpool, and after his return to America, established in Boston the first institution of the kind in this country, a few months before the beginning of the Mercantile Library in New York. He may be said to have carried his unostentatious benevolence all over the continent. He saw his plans adopted at Philadelphia, Albany, New Orleans, and many other places, and in 1823 he founded "The Apprentices' Library Association of the Village of Brooklyn," now known as the Brooklyn Institute and Youths' Free Library. A curious illustration of his method of working is given in Mr. Stiles's *History of Brooklyn*. He called at the office of a Brooklyn newspaper one day to talk over his project of an Apprentices' Library, and found the editor, Colonel Spooner, delighted with the idea. "Well," said Mr. Wood, "let's begin at once;" and with that he proceeded to select from the editor's shelves all the volumes that were suitable for his purpose, and to pile them up in a corner. It was several years before the society was rich enough to buy any books. All was done at first by begging, and it is related that the officers used to go around from house to house, with a wheelbarrow to collect donations. Mr. Wood is described as a jovial old bachelor, fond of books and of children, and generally beloved by young men as a sort of universal guide, philosopher, and grandfather. He spent the closing years of his life at Canandaigua, and died there about eighteen or twenty years ago, at the age of seventy-five.

It was in 1820 that he began to interest himself in the formation of a clerks' library

in New York. He talked with the young men and filled a small knot of them with enthusiasm for the scheme. He talked with the old merchants, and showed them how they might find a profit by investing a few hundred dollars in an institution which would keep their employes away from the rum-shop and the billiard-room. A call was at last issued in his name for a meeting of clerks and others, to take the matter into consideration. They met at the Tontine Coffee House in Wall street, on the 9th of November, Mr. C. C. Cambreleng acting as chairman. A second meeting was held on the 27th of the same month, and at this a constitution was adopted and the first officers were chosen,—Lucius Bull, President; George S. Robbins, Vice-President; and Allen Robbins, Secretary. Mr. Wood was elected a director. The board lost no time in getting to work. They raised a little money by the contributions of public-spirited merchants; they obtained the names of a pretty fair roll of members; they bought and begged books; and on the 12th of February, 1821, the library was opened in an upper room at No. 49 Fulton street. Mr. John Thompson was the first librarian. He received the munificent salary of a hundred and fifty dollars a year, and was burdened with the charge of seven hundred volumes, which were accessible to members only in the evening.

We shall not pause to chronicle the successive steps by which, from this humble beginning, the Library rose to its present position; all these will no doubt be duly described in the elaborate history of the institution, which some of the old members and ex-officers are now preparing for the press; but we may say that for three years very little progress was made, and but for the indefatigable and courageous Mr. Wood, the whole scheme would probably have fallen through. By the year 1826, however, the prospects were so bright that the officers felt justified in hiring a suite of rooms in the Harpers' building, in Cliff street, and starting the reading-room, which has ever since been such an important feature of the institution. The whole stock of periodicals at the beginning consisted of four weekly papers and seven magazines.





CLINTON HALL.

Two years later the number of volumes had risen to 4,400; the number of members was about 1,200, and the income from annual dues and fees amounted to \$1,750.

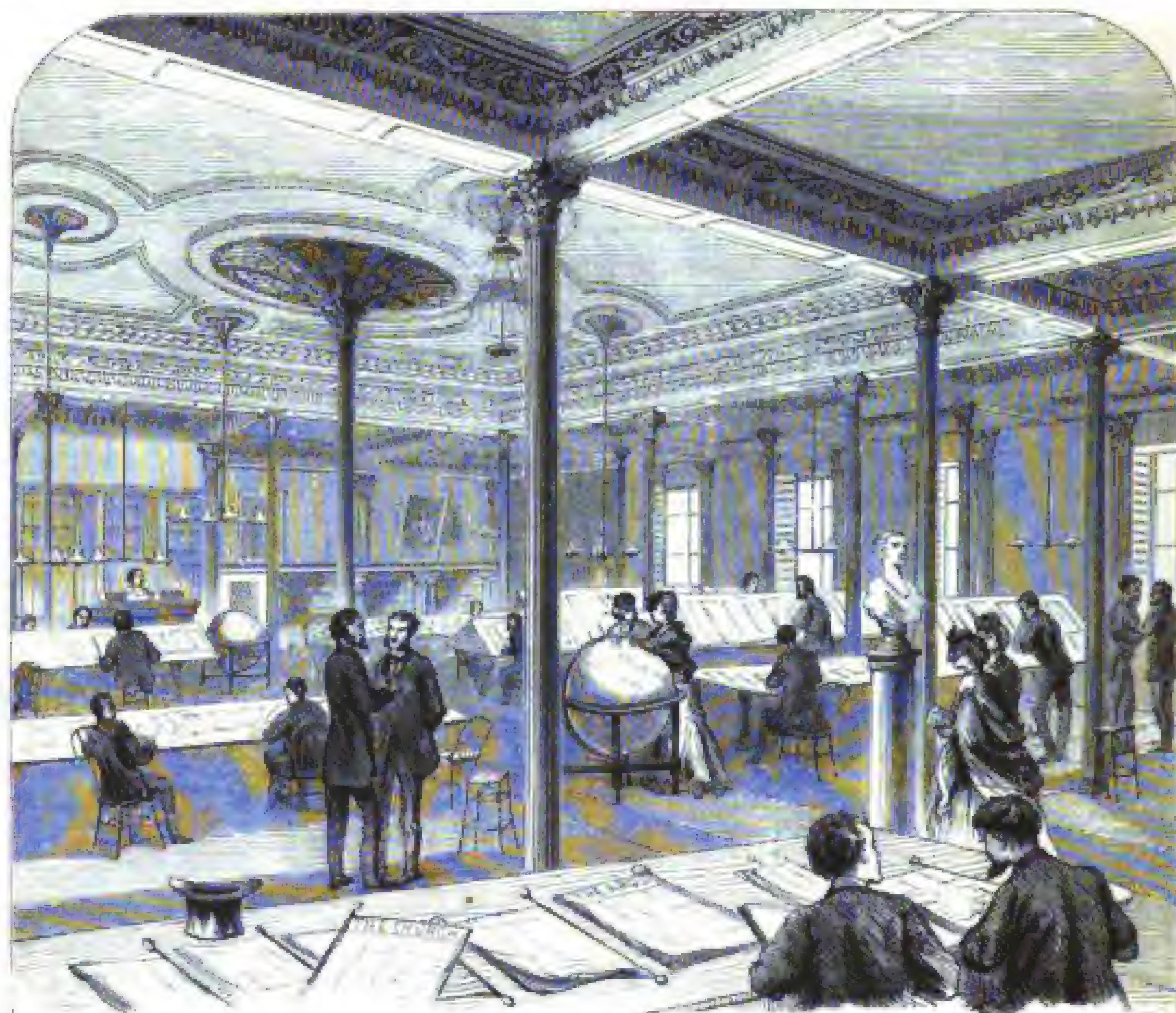
About this time begins the connection of the Mercantile Library with the Clinton Hall Association—a corporation which we can best define by saying that it is practically a Board of Trustees, composed of older men than those who manage the affairs of the Library; that its chief function is to hold and control real estate for the benefit of the institution; and that in one way or another it has a limited corrective authority over the transactions of the junior society. When the Library first proposed to put up a building of its own, in 1828, and asked the merchants of the city to raise a subscription for that purpose, there were many who were ready enough to give—Arthur Tappan, for instance, at once started the list with a donation of \$1,000—but doubted the prudence of trusting young and inexperienced clerks with the exclusive management of property which in a few years must certainly become immensely valuable. Hence the subscribers to the building fund, organized as a distinct body, elected seven trustees—William W. Woolsey being the first president, and John W. Leavitt the first treasurer—and

kept the title to the property in their own name. The fund was divided into shares of \$100 each, and during the year the subscriptions amounted to no less than \$33,500. With this fund the old Clinton Hall was begun on the corner of Nassau and Beekman streets, and on the 2d of November, 1830, it was formally opened to the public.

Beekman street was pretty well up town in those days, but in the course of twenty years the dwelling-houses got far away beyond it, and by 1850 there were hardly any members of the

Association who lived within a mile of the Library. An agitation for removal began to stir the politics of the institute. Reasonable as the proposition seemed, it was hotly contested—in fact, it is the habit of the members to debate everything connected with the policy of the Library rather more earnestly than if the fate of the nation depended upon the issue; and when the question was put to a vote of the whole body in January, 1853, the anti-removal party carried the day by a considerable majority. Just here, however, the history of the controversy assumes a comical aspect; for while the one side was rejoicing over its victory and the other sulking over its defeat, it was discovered that the Clinton Hall Association had already sold the old building and bought the Italian Opera House in Astor Place, and so the dispute had been about nothing at all. The Library was opened in its new quarters in May, 1855, and there it has since flourished, growing so fast that it is already beginning to choke for want of room, and to meditate another removal to a commodious fire-proof edifice, for the erection of which a very respectable sum of money has been laid aside. The debt contracted at the time of the removal to Astor Place was all paid off by the spring of 1866, and since that





THE READING-ROOM.

time the institution has not only been entirely self-supporting, but has been able to add to its reserve fund every year.

The building in Astor Place (which, like the old one, is called Clinton Hall) is nearly wedge-shaped in its ground plan, and the reading-room and library occupy the second and third stories of the big end of the wedge. They are approached by a broad double staircase, starting from the entrance hall, which runs through from Astor Place to Eighth street. On one side of the first landing is the sales-room of Messrs. Leavitt, Strebeigh & Co., book auctioneers, who lease all that part of the building not required by the Library Association. On the other side is the entrance to the reading-room. It is a cheerful, well-lighted, well-ventilated apartment, with rows of tall windows opening to the floor,—not encumbered with superfluous ornament, nor decorated with furniture too good to be used, but a room in which one can pass an hour or so

very pleasantly with the aid of a comfortable chair and a copy of SCRIBNER'S MONTHLY. The newspapers are placed on standing files, with high stools in front of them for those who prefer to sit. The literary journals are scattered over the long oak tables which stretch in two rows down the middle of the room. At the end opposite the door are racks for the reviews and magazines, each having its appropriate numbered compartment.

We believe there is no leading newspaper of the United States which is not to be found in this room. All the principal papers of London are here; all the principal papers of Paris *were* here until Von Moltke suddenly cut off the supply; Berlin, Vienna, and other great European capitals send specimens of their periodical literature; and there is a liberal representation of the press of Canada and the West Indies. At the date of the last Annual Report there were 208 different newspapers on the files, and 174 magazines and reviews.



These are so well selected that, with their aid, one can easily obtain a correct idea of public opinion in any part of the world. Science, politics, general literature, religion, and special studies of all kinds are quite as well represented as the newspaper chronicles of the day. At one table you may see a group of sober-looking gentlemen absorbed in the political essays of *The Saturday Review*, the criticisms of *The Athenæum*, the financial speculations of *The Economist*, or the figures of *The Railroad Journal*. Opposite, may be, is a young doctor studying a medical review, or a divinity student reading *The Congregational Quarterly*. The story papers are greatly in demand, and though there are many of them, foreign and domestic, there are not more than the readers have pretty constant use for. A certain low stand about the middle of the room is never without visitors. Here are kept the principal comic papers of Europe, and an interesting lesson in the varieties of national humor might be learned by contrasting *Punch* and *Judy* with the grotesque and flavorful drolleries of the *Kladderadatsch* and the *Fliegende Blätter*, the rude wit of *Charivari*, and the highly-seasoned satire of *La Vie Parisienne*. The comparisons are broken indeed, just now, for Paris has other work on hand than sending us the vagaries of her comic artists; but Germany has laughed as heartily as usual all through the war, and has, of course, shown us Napoleon and Gambetta, Jules Favre and M. Thiers, in all sorts of ridiculous attitudes and disguises. There is an extensive variety of pictorial papers of the character of *The Illustrated London News*. *The Graphic*, with its admirable drawings and careful printing; the French illustrated papers—inferior in all respects to the English; the German, better than the French but not equal to *The Graphic*; and lastly, a Canadian illustrated journal, which is a marvel of enterprise, but also, we regret to say, a marvel of bad wood engraving, are here on exhibition. We believe, in fact, that no reading-room in the United States compares with this for variety and extent, except the admirable free reading-room at the Cooper Institute.

At the upper end of the room is an elevated desk for the superintendent, who is always a

lady. The natural taste of the sex for neatness and order finds in this office an ample opportunity for exercise, and notwithstanding the numbers who resort to the reading-room, the periodicals are well kept, and a comfortable aspect of tidiness pervades the apartment. Unfortunately, there are men with so little conscience as occasionally to mutilate a paper or magazine—to furtively tear out a picture, or even put a periodical in their pocket—and the officers are always on the watch for mean rogues of this sort; but the losses upon the whole are much less serious than one might naturally suppose, and the damages are promptly repaired—as far as paste and thread will repair them. Behind the superintendent's desk, separated by a counter and railing from the rest of the room, is a row of small alcoves. In these are filed away a few of the back numbers of every paper, magazine, and review received at the establishment, and you can see any one you want by asking for it. Here, too, is a valuable collection of books of reference—dictionaries in all languages; gazetteers; maps; annual registers; the best cyclopædias—American, English, French, and German; Biblical dictionaries—whatever, in fact, a man is likely to want for an explanation of the hard things that he finds in his reading. The counter is not an impassable barrier, for you may always see somebody behind it, deep in the consultation of the big volumes which are not allowed to be taken away from the room. If you want any other book not to be found in these alcoves, write the title of it on one of the cards kept at the desk, add your name and the number of your ticket, and give the card to the lady at the desk. She sends it up to the library in a dumb-waiter, and in a moment or two the book comes down by the same conveyance.

The ornaments of the room are confined to a few works of art presented at various times by the friends of the institution both at home and abroad, portraits of eminent New York merchants and other persons, casts of statuary, and some interesting framed autographs. On each side of the entrance there is a small room, one for the exclusive use of ladies, the other for "conversation." But neither seems to be much used. Ladies have no hesitation



in taking their seats at the tables in the main room, where the periodicals are close at hand, and their presence attracts no special notice. In fact, the good order and quiet which always prevail in the reading-room are no doubt attributable to the frequent visits of the gentler sex, as well as the fact that it is a woman who is charged with the enforcement of the rules. The most boisterous and incorrigible of young bloods would immediately stop talking and take his feet off the table, if the request came from the lips of a good-looking superintendent in petticoats. There are two ladies employed in the reading-room, who relieve each other at stated hours, and they never seem to have the slightest difficulty in keeping order.

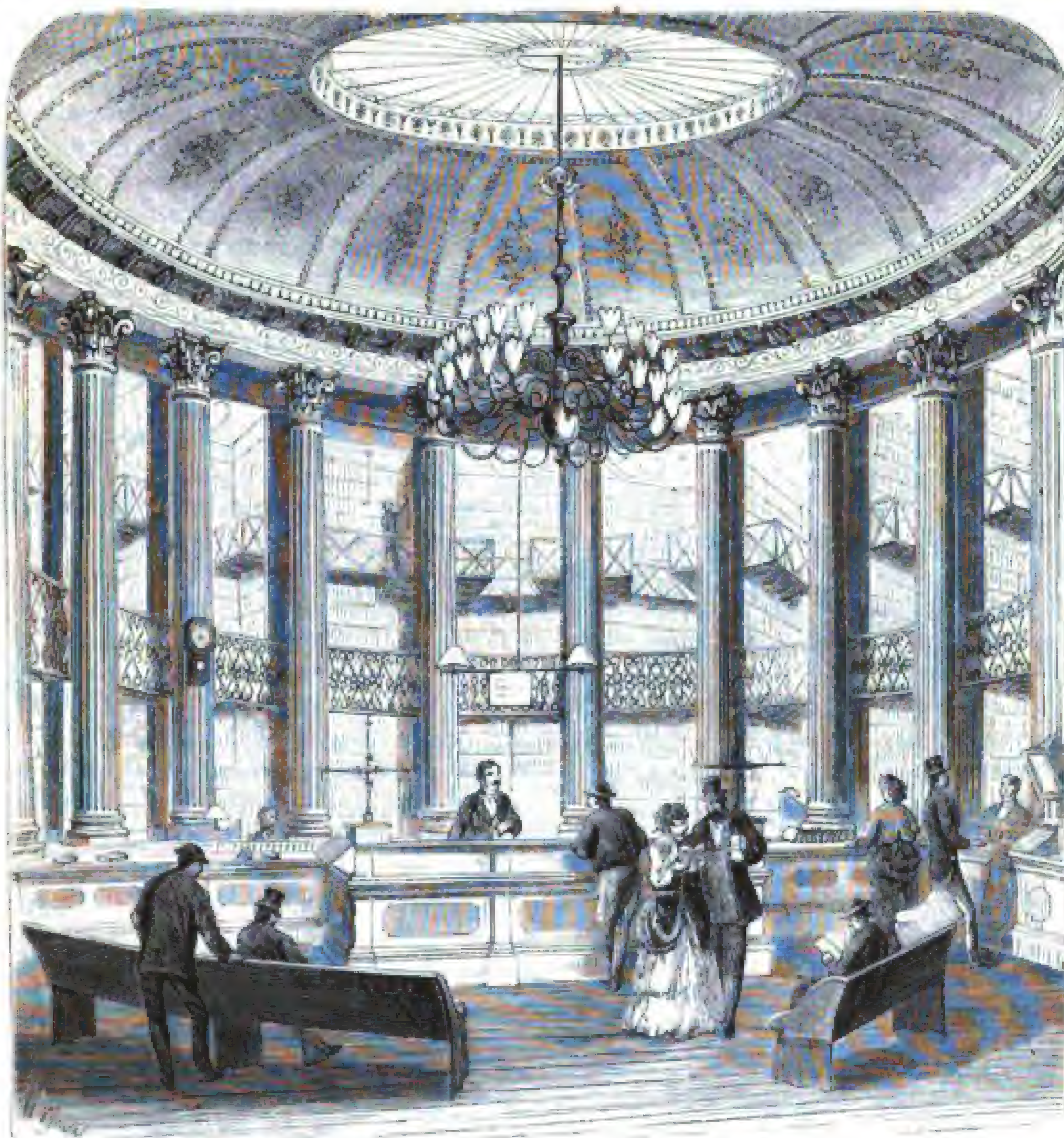
The reading-room is visited by about one thousand persons every day. In the morning the readers are chiefly substantial merchants, retired business men, professional and literary gentlemen, and perhaps a few journalists. There are many faces which you will see there almost every day from one end of the year to the other, and some of the habitual visitors have their favorite corners, not to say their favorite chairs, where, at certain hours, they may be confidently looked for. Most of these are men without active business; some have grown rich; some have broken down in the race for wealth and given up in despair; some retain a nominal connection with commerce, but only saunter into their counting-rooms towards mid-day and leave the burden to the younger generation; some wear an unmistakable air of prosperity and comfortable idleness; and a few have the cowed and shabby look of men who have breakfasted badly at a cheap boarding-house and slept in a mean little hall bed-room. As the day wears on, ladies and literary men become more numerous, and the Bohemians of the daily and weekly press stray in and out, hunting up a fact or running over the magazines in search of an idea. We are bound to say that whispering now becomes rather more frequent, and the ladies are much less attentive readers than the middle-aged gentlemen who filled the room in the morning. It is not until six or seven o'clock in the evening that the class of young men for whom the institution is chiefly designed are found here in great numbers.

As soon as the dinner or tea hour has passed the clerks begin to drop in, and until the room closes for the night at ten o'clock, the desks and tables are well filled, and the silence is broken by the continual rustle of leaves. This is the time when the reading-room fulfills the noblest of its functions,—when it not merely serves for the amusement of the curious and idle, and the convenience of the studious, but draws away from the worst temptations of the great city those who are most accessible to its seductions and least able to guard against them.

The library is situated on the third floor of the building, immediately over the reading-room. A lofty apartment, with a dome and skylight supported by a circle of fluted columns, it seems to be well enough adapted to its special purpose,—the reception and delivery of books,—but it has no beauty, either of ornament or architectural design; it is rather cramped, and it lacks even the elegance which rows of neatly-bound books generally confer upon a library, for all the volumes here are covered with brown paper, and the shelves, though neatly kept, present a decidedly dingy aspect. In fact it is not a lounging-place for readers, but a depot where business is transacted with mercantile despatch and regularity. A counter runs around the room from column to column, and no one is admitted behind it except the attendants, officers, and ex-officers of the library, and those who receive special permission to visit a certain nook set apart for "consulting readers." Alcoves radiate from the central circle formed by the counter and the columns, and iron galleries, approached by light staircases, divide each alcove into three stories.

The arrangement of books is peculiar, and perhaps an old fashioned bibliophile would call it horribly unphilosophical, for there is no attempt at classification by subject, the only purpose of the librarian who devised the system being to place the books so as to expedite delivery. As novels are more called for than any other kind of literature, the alcoves nearest the delivery desk—comprising about a third of the whole library—are appropriated to them. The rest of the books are arranged in strictly alphabetical order, under the





THE LIBRARY.

author's name when that is known, and under the first letter of the leading word in the title when the work is anonymous. There are some exceptions to this rule, however, for books in foreign languages are placed by themselves, and bound volumes of those periodicals for which there is not a very active demand, are stored away in the second gallery. This arrangement is found to work very well for a lending library, though for an institution like the Astor, where a student often wants to collate all the accessible authorities on a given subject without knowing, before hand, what those authorities are, it of

course would not answer. At the Mercantile there is no delay in finding what you want, and books are not liable to be misplaced. The lettering on the back of the paper cover shows the attendant at a glance where the volume belongs, and as this lettering is always carefully done, by an experienced person, mistakes are very rare.

Now let us see the system of delivery: Each member on joining the library has a folio assigned him in the ledger, and its number is written on the ticket which is given him as a certificate of membership. Let us suppose you have received one of these



tickets, have taken out a book, have read it, and now want another. You look through the printed catalogue, of which there are several copies chained to the counters, and having made your selection, you fill up a card on which is printed the following blank form:—

Folio  
 {                      } *Returns*

*Wants one of the following:*

*Name,*

*Address,*

You hand that to one of the attendants, and after checking off the volume you have returned, he looks for the first one on your list of books wanted; if that is already out, he looks for the second. When he has found a book for you he hands it, with your application card, to the delivery clerk. This gentleman occupies a large desk at the central counter, and has before him two immense drawers, divided into partitions for the reception of the cards. Each member's name has a place in one or the other of these drawers, and the number of the folio shows where that place is. The clerk turns instantly to your name, and finds the card you handed in when you last borrowed a book. If the date, stamped at the time of delivery, shows that you have kept it longer than the rules allow, he levies a small fine, and you must pay it before you can borrow again. All formalities transacted, the old card is destroyed, the new one put in its place, and you are sent away in peace. You may change your book three or four times a day, and the young men at the desk will never complain of the trouble. No women are employed in this part of the library—there is too much running about to suit them; but ladies are among the most frequent visitors, and we dare say that hourly intercourse with young women has a mollifying influence upon the manners of the attendants. Whether it is the effect of association or natural urbanity, we cannot undertake to decide; but the employes of the Mercantile Library could certainly give lessons in politeness to the officials of almost any of our public institutions.

The system of checking books, as we have described it, enables the librarian to ascertain in a moment just what any particular member has borrowed; but it evidently does not show what has become of any particular book. For instance, you have called four or five times for Jones Robinson's latest romance, and the answer is always, "Out." Now, Jones Robinson is not a popular author, and you are justified in suspecting that his romance is not borrowed as fast as it comes in, but that somebody has lost it, or kept it over the time. The librarian has no record to show who has that book, or how long it has been out. He can look over every member's account, and thus he will find it sooner or later; but there are more than 10,000 members, and it would take longer to find Jones Robinson's book than any of the writings of that eminent romancer are worth. Many attempts have been made to devise a double system of accounts, so that a check could be kept upon the members and the books at the same time; but every plan hitherto tried has complicated the process of delivery too much, and involved great waste of time without corresponding advantage. A partial book record, however, is now kept, and is, perhaps, as good as any that can be suggested. Whenever a standard work is borrowed, the delivery clerk marks upon a little yellow ticket simply the folio number of the borrower. Every day the yellow tickets are examined, and if it appear, say, that folio 10,029 has had a book more than three weeks, the clerk turns to the drawer, finds out who folio 10,029 is, and what book is charged against him, and sends him a notice that his time is up. It is found impracticable to apply this system to novels, which form the greater part of the circulation of the library; but it is useful as far as it goes, and prevents the loss of many valuable books.

Of late years a postal order scheme has been perfected, and for convenience and simplicity it could hardly be improved. Its design is to enable members to draw books without visiting the library. Blank forms are obtained from the Post-office Department, about the size and shape of a newspaper wrapper, bearing on one side a two-cent postage stamp, and the printed address, "Mercantile Library,



Astor Place, City," and on the other a blank application, with a five-cent "Mercantile Library delivery stamp," and some printed directions. You fill up the application in the usual way, fold the wrapper like a note (it is already gummed), and drop it in the nearest Post-office box. In a few hours at furthest a messenger brings to your house the book you have asked for, and takes away the volume you want to return. The system is fast increasing in popularity. A horse and wagon are constantly employed in the collection and delivery, and the number of volumes sent out in this way is about 12,000 annually. The delivery blanks are sold at the rate of seven cents each—two cents representing the postage and five the cost of the delivery.

But the library is not content with doing so much for the young men of New York; it is gradually taking care of the suburbs also. Branch offices have been opened at Yonkers, Norwalk, Stamford, Elizabeth, and Jersey City (not to speak of branches near the two extremities of the metropolis, namely, in Cedar street and Yorkville), at each of which there is a collection of about 500 volumes, and a desk for the reception and delivery of books belonging to the main office in Astor Place. Every morning a stout canvas bag, containing books returned and application cards for books wanted, is sent by express from each of these offices to the library, and every afternoon the bag goes back full. The directors offer to establish a branch in any suburb where one hundred subscribers can be obtained in advance, and we may expect, therefore, a great development of this part of the enterprise.

It will be seen from what we have already said, that the library has extended its advantages far beyond the limited class for which it was founded. Its management remains, indeed, in the hands of clerks; but nobody is excluded from its privileges. Ladies are among its more frequent patrons; professional men, merchants, gentlemen of leisure, all make constant use of it. By the constitution no one but a clerk can vote or hold office in the institution; but the definition of a clerk has been gradually stretched to comprehend not only young men in mercantile

pursuits, but nearly everybody who lives on a salary. These members pay an initiation fee of \$1, and a subscription of \$4 a year. When they go into business for themselves, and are graduated as merchants, they lose the right to vote and hold office, but retain the other privileges of membership at the same rate of payment. Any other person may become a subscriber, with the right to use the reading-room and borrow books, on payment of \$5 a year. The number of active members on the 30th of April, 1870, was 7,223; of subscribers, 3,705; of honorary members, 99; of Clinton Hall stockholders, 1,762; of editors, with free admission, 78; making a total of 12,867 persons entitled to the use of the library and reading-room. This is about 2,000 more than ever appeared on the rolls before; but there is not a steady increase in the membership, as we should suppose there would be in a fast growing city, and in this respect the institution has been nearly stationary for the last five or six years.

During the year 1869-'70 about 3,000 members joined, but then during the same time 2,500 withdrew. Just before the election of officers there has always been a great accession of new names, procured by the influence of rival candidates, and many of these drop off as soon as they have voted. A great many young men also join the library in a sudden fit of steadiness, take out one book, throw it aside, and neither visit the place again nor return the book. The last annual report shows that a large number of the "withdrawals" must be of this kind. Of the 2,583 names removed from the books last year only 168 were formally withdrawn; the rest are marked "closed by the Constitution."

We mentioned in the beginning of this article that the New York Mercantile Library was the fourth in the country in point of size. The largest is the Library of Congress, which, in 1869, had 175,000 volumes, and at the end of 1870 must have had about 183,000. The Boston Public Library comes next with 165,000. The Astor Library has 138,000. The Mercantile has nominally 120,000 volumes, and increases at the rate of 13,000 volumes a year, while the annual growth of



the Boston and Congress Libraries is only 9,000 each. It would be difficult, however, for the librarian to account for all the books which appear on the catalogue. The losses are inevitably heavy, and there seems to be no way of preventing them. One of the ex-librarians estimated the annual loss of volumes borrowed and never returned, at about 300; but this is certainly far below the truth. Perhaps 10,000 volumes which are supposed to be in the library may be set down as lost beyond recovery,—most of them being in the hands of persons who have moved away and left no trace of their residence. Many are deliberately stolen, and sometimes the library suffers from its courtesy to impostors who have no claim whatever to the privileges of such an institution. We saw, not long ago, the book account of a lively gentleman who had succeeded in convincing the librarian that he was sub-editor of a leading New York paper, and on the strength of that had borrowed (though he was not a member) *all* the important works relating to a particular subject,

including several valuable volumes. He was never seen again. The journal whose name he used did not know him, and, of course, the books were not recovered. But after all, if we consider the enormous circulation of this library, and the fact that no deposit or other guarantee is required of borrowers, it is wonderful that the depletion of its store has been so slight. Probably no other library in the world, except the great free libraries of Liverpool and Manchester, and certainly no other library in America, sends out so many volumes in the course of the year. The circulation of the Mercantile during the year ending May 1st, 1879, was 234,120, and the next annual report will probably show a circulation of 300,000, not including the books used for consultation in the library. This is considerably in excess of the returns of the Boston institution, whose annual circulation, at the latest report, was 218,000.

Some curious particulars respecting the circulation in New York are furnished by Mr. A. M. Palmer, the very competent Librarian.



SATURDAY NIGHT.



Of the total number of volumes delivered last year, 169,646 were works of fiction, 57,272 were works of standard English and American literature, and 7,202 were in foreign languages. The returns for past years show that the proportions vary but little—that is to say, the novels make up about 70 per cent. of the total circulation. Of course they do not constitute anything like 70 per cent. of the works in the library. Novels are read quickly and changed often, and pass through a dozen hands while more serious works are passing through one.

The average daily delivery of books is 760, about three-quarters of which are handed over the counter of the library proper in Astor Place, the rest being distributed by the branch offices or delivered by carriers. But the circulation fluctuates between widely distant extremes. In mid-summer it has been but little over 300 a day. In winter it always rises, and on the 19th of February last it reached the large number of 1,832 volumes. That day was a Saturday, and as Washington's birthday came on the following Tuesday, the members had to provide reading matter for two holidays.

Saturday always presents an animated scene at the library. In the afternoon great numbers of young ladies turn aside from the regular Broadway promenades, and throng the library counters, looking over the latest novels and other new books, some scores of which are there spread out for inspection; or searching the catalogue, or taking advice from the clerks about something to read for the coming week. If the young men can get away from business before dusk, it is noticed that they have no objection to come for their weekly supply while the hall is still gay with ribbons and bright eyes, and many of them perhaps are unreasonably long in making their selections. The crowd, however, comes later in the evening. Then indeed the clerks must be brisk. There is a constant running from counter to alcove, from gallery to gallery, a constant calling out of numbers, and a wild shouting of titles. "Folio seven thousand and ten! Here you are!" and a book is laid on the desk with a delicate sort of a whack. "Folio ninety-six!

Mark Twain is out; try something else?" "Folio five hundred! Where is five hundred? Who asked for *Little Women*? Is this yours, Madame?" and so on, hour after hour, till the clock strikes nine, and then there is rest for the weary clerks till eight o'clock on Monday morning.

Of course it always happens that a great many people want the same book, especially when the book is new, and the librarian consequently buys a number of copies of every publication for which there is likely to be a general demand. He bought 500 copies of *Lothair*, and afterward sold about 150 of them, as the public interest in the work gradually died away. There are still, however, 50 or 75 copies in use all the time. More of the surplus stock might be sold; but experience has shown that the popularity of a book is subject to unforeseen revivals, and if Mr. Disraeli should die, or become prime minister, or do anything else to bring himself into prominent notice, there would be a sudden call for all the copies on hand. Moreover, books wear out very soon in a lending library, and it is desirable to have a reserve to renew them from. Of Mark Twain's *Innocents Abroad* the library has 115 copies, all of which are constantly in use and ordered in advance. Of *Man and Wife* 250 copies were purchased, and the demand was far in excess of the supply. Among the most popular of recent publications are Miss Alcott's *Little Women* and *An Old-Fashioned Girl*, 250 copies of each being in constant circulation; *A Brave Lady*, which calls for 75 copies; *The Gates Ajar*, 52 copies; *Hedged In*, 50 copies; *The Villa on the Rhine*, 50 copies; *The Countess Gisela*, 50 copies; Pumpelly's *Across America and Asia*, 30 copies; Orton's *The Andes and the Amazon*, 20 copies; Crabb Robinson's *Diary*, 20 copies; Miss Mitford's *Life and Letters*, 25 copies; Lecky's *History of European Morals*, 10 copies; Froude's concluding volumes, 15 copies; Hall's *Health by Good Living*, 20 copies. Most of these figures apply to the date of the last annual report, and since that time there has probably been a falling off in the demand for some of the books enumerated. There is a steadily in-



creasing call for Dickens, which of course was greatly augmented after his death; but *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* is not much in demand. *Red as a Rose is She* was so popular that 100 copies were called for all the time; and the librarian was also obliged to buy a number of extra copies of two previous works by the same writer, which had almost passed out of circulation. Of Miss Evans's *Vashti* 200 copies were for some time in constant use, but it is little read now. On the other hand it was necessary to buy last year 15 extra copies of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, 12 of *Beulah*, and 6 of *The Marble Faun*. Of so serious a work as Henry James's *Secret of Swedenborg*, there is a steady use for 5 copies.

There is an increasing demand for Buckle, Mill, and the essays and reviews of Macaulay, of all of which it has been necessary to enlarge the stock. Tyndall, Huxley, and Lubbock are very extensively read; and the new theories and developments of science seem to excite a great deal of interest among the patrons of the Library. If there is no perceptible change in the ratio between works of fiction and standard literature circulated, there is certainly an improvement in the public taste manifested by the relative popularity of good and mediocre authors in both those departments. In fiction, for example, out of 1,000 volumes issued recently in a single day, no fewer than 55 were by Thackeray, and 25 by Scott. The steady advance of the popular relish for Thackeray is unmistakable. Every year the admirers of this noblest among novelists are multiplied, and the librarian finds it more and more difficult to satisfy their applications. The popularity of Sir Walter Scott seems also to augment. Charles Reade and Mrs. Craik (Miss Muloch) are steady favorites. The circulation of Charlotte Brontë's novels has always been large, and grows larger and larger every year.

In another department of literature it is interesting to know that a taste for the master works of Germany is spreading very fast. Of late years there has been a constantly growing demand for English translations of Goethe and Schiller—especially Goethe—while the



THE LIBRARIAN'S ROOM.

originals of these works are also called for pretty often. Voltaire is renewing his youth; and Lamartine, whose popularity was long on the wane, is now gaining a hold upon a new generation of readers. Many will be surprised to learn that a taste for genealogical research has become very general. The Library has a large collection of works in this department, and all of them are in demand. Works on theology or morals find great numbers of readers. Treatises on physical education and cognate subjects are universally popular, not one of any note being allowed to stand idle on the shelves. Books on landscape-gardening and architecture are much more generally read than one would suppose, considering that so large a majority of the members have no opportunity to put their lessons to practical use. Narratives of travel, of course, are always in demand; and biography, in which the Library is exceptionally rich, grows more and more popular every year. The bound files of daily newspapers are in use, one might almost say, day and night. This, however, is not owing entirely to a popular passion for historical research; for a large proportion of the persons who consult them are lawyers' clerks and others interested in legal proceedings, which require a reference to court reports, notices, adver-

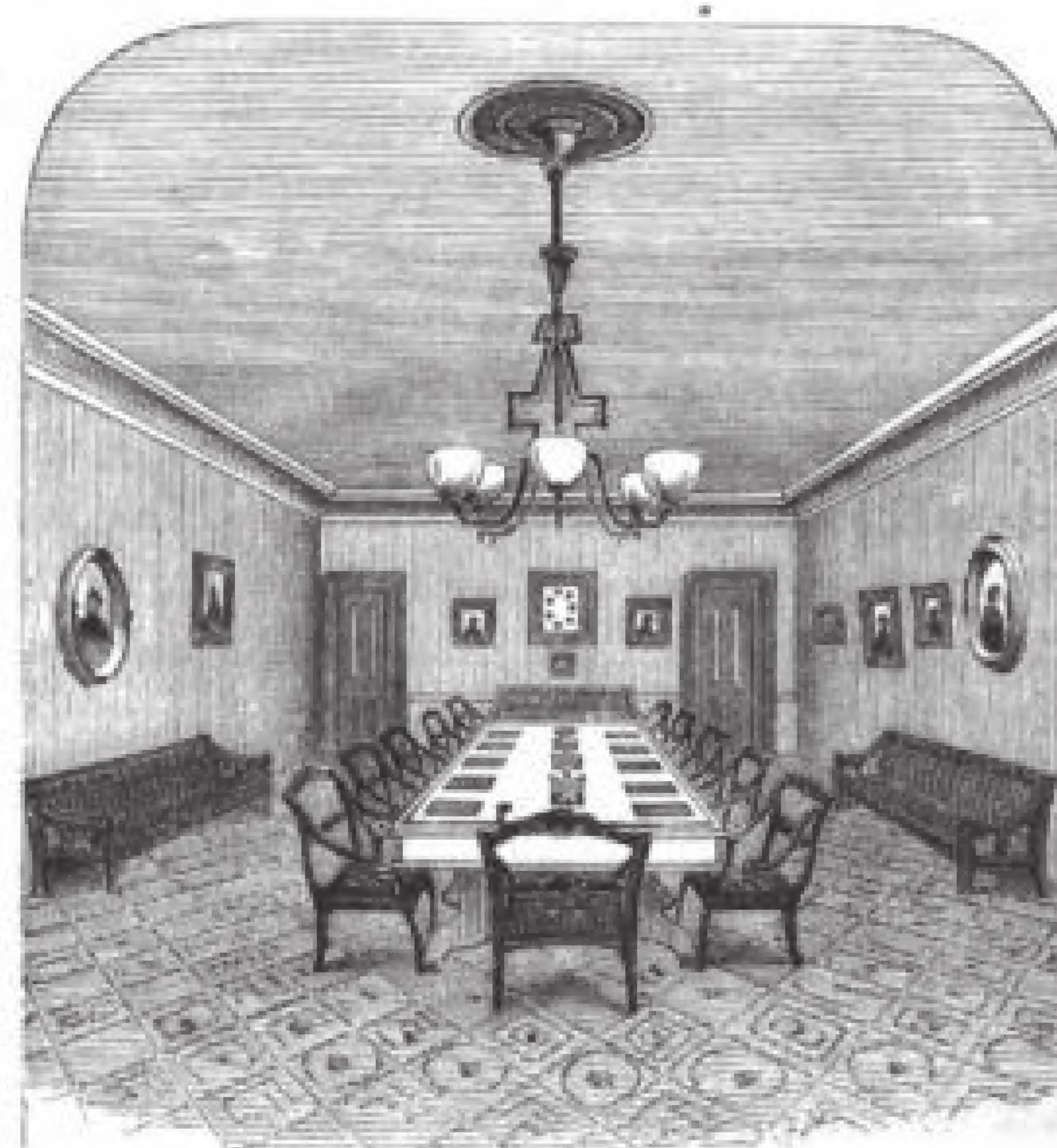


tisements, and so on. Everybody, in fact, who has occasion to refer to back numbers of a newspaper is perforce driven to the Mercantile Library, since the editors of the leading journals do not, as a rule, permit their office files to be examined.

In a comfortably-furnished little room, opening out of one of the alcoves, sits the quiet young man who is the executive head and administrator of this extensive establishment. Mr. A. M. Palmer was appointed Librarian in October, 1869; and though he has been but a little while in office, he has introduced so many improvements, and increased so much the popularity of the Library, that the Directors have already abundant proof of the wisdom of their choice. The system under which the Library is administered is of course the growth of years, and the product of the labor and ingenuity of various librarians, prominent among whom, both for capacity and length of service, was Mr. S. Hastings Grant. It is the librarian's province to purchase books, direct the daily labors of his subordinates, oversee the entire regulation of the Library and reading-room—in fact, to govern the whole establishment. There is a supervisory Board of Directors, to whom the librarian is responsible; but these gentlemen are of course unable to take much practical share in the management. Under the constitution they must all be clerks, so that they have little time to devote to the affairs of the Library, even had they the disposition. Twelve Directors are chosen, by vote of the members, for a term of three years, one-third retiring every year; and the Directors select from their own number a President, Vice-President, two Secretaries, and a Treasurer. Mr. M. C. D. Borden is now serving his second term as President. None of these officers receive any compensation or enjoy any important privileges which are not shared by all the members.

The annual elections, however, are scenes of the most intense excitement; and, in the eyes of a young clerk, running for office in the Mercantile Library Association is only a little less important affair than running for Congress. There are usually two tickets in the field, the "Regular" and the "Reform," the

difference between which it would puzzle anybody to define. Last year, for instance, it was generally understood that the Reformers were in favor of opening the reading-room on Sunday, and the Regulars were not, and on this point the canvass was made to turn. In point of fact, both parties were anxious to have the room open on Sunday, and neither had power to act in the matter, the decision resting entirely with the Clinton Hall Trustees! One cry, however, was as good as another for keeping up the excitement, and there was consequently a very lively fight. The streets were placarded with appeals; the newspapers contained long advertisements; the rival candidates and their friends made personal visits to as many of the members as they could reach. Even the "naturalization mills," which are said to have manufactured voters with such rapidity at the City Hall, were imitated, on this as on many other occasions, at Astor Place. Members were initiated at the instance (and perhaps at the expense) of anxious office-seekers, merely in order that they might vote for their friends; and indeed during many years it was usual for the list of membership, just before the election, to be increased by at least 1,000 or 1,200 names. This, to be sure, represented a substantial gain to the treasury; but not a permanent one, for most of these "naturalized voters" fell off after paying the first half year's



THE DIRECTORS' ROOM.



dues. A recent amendment to the constitution, however, has swept away this custom, by providing that no one shall vote who has not been a member at least three months.

The polls open on the third Tuesday in May at eight o'clock in the morning, and close at nine P.M. Long before the opening, the staircase is crowded with members. Canvassers press the claims of their respective parties, and thrust ballots into the hands of undecided voters. A long cue is formed with some difficulty, reaching down the stairs, and through the hall, and out into the street, and the strong force of police on duty have about as much as they can do to keep the exuberant animal spirits of the free and unterrified electors within reasonable bounds. When the voting begins, there is for a while a little Babel of confusion. Every man who offers a ballot gives his name, folio, and place of business, and the inspectors check it off by the books of membership, which serve as a registry. As the morning wears away, the crowd disperses, for most of the clerks must be at their business, and for several hours there is a lull. But towards evening the contest begins in earnest. Now the uproar becomes hideous; the police force is increased; the anxiety of the election agents, as one party or the other seems to gain, rises in its intensity, and the way of the voter to the polls is beset with terrors.

We regret to say that the young gentlemen have been known to take advantage of a singular omission of the statute law, which makes it no felony to vote unlawfully at a Mercantile Library election, and that repeating has consequently been practised to an extent at which the Sixth Ward would stand aghast. At the election in May, 1870, it was reported, we suppose with truth, that a room was provided in a convenient location, where the repeaters changed their coats and hats after every vote, and thence issued into the presence of the inspectors with fresh names, fresh folios, and fresh business addresses. Of course to do this it was necessary to get at least a partial list of the members—which was easy enough—and the repeater ran the risk of adopting the name of somebody who had voted already; but if his fraud was de-

tected, the inspectors could do nothing but refuse his vote. In point of fact, during the evening about one vote in every six was rejected; but many illegal ballots must have been cast in the hurry and confusion. After the close of the polls most of the members hang about the hall until the result is declared, and amuse themselves in the meantime with noise, and uproar, and practical jokes, such as are hardly known elsewhere except in the Board of Brokers, when the gentlemen of Wall street chance to be in one of their facetious moods. How much can be made of a little thing is well illustrated by the result of the hotly contested election of last year. Only twelve hundred members voted, though the confusion was enough to indicate a constituency of six or seven thousand. It is a proof of the satisfaction of the members with the administration of the Institution, that the "Regular" ticket triumphed by a majority of 175, the principal officers being re-elected. No ladies voted, though many were entitled to; but a colored citizen deposited his ballot, and it is gratifying to know that his right was not questioned.

There are other topics connected with the Library which we must dismiss with a hurried word. Walking down a narrow passage-way that runs off at right angles with the main hall, opposite the entrance to the Library, we find on the left a row of small rooms, in which evening classes are held in the modern languages, elocution, music, and phonography. Their purpose is to enable young men to obtain instruction at a low price, and in this way they have been of great benefit; but the work they have hitherto done for a small price is now done by various public institutions without any price at all, and the Directors are accordingly discussing the propriety of giving them up. The lecture system, however, is a means of popular instruction which the association has pursued with remarkable success. The best lyceum speakers are always secured for the Mercantile Library courses, and during the present Winter the society has had the credit of introducing "Tom Brown" Hughes to New York, besides securing Mr. Sumner, Mr. Mundella, and other more or less eminent persons.



In the extreme corner of the Library building there is a little room, hardly bigger than a cell, where two or three men are constantly at work in certain very important duties. To this room every book is brought as soon as it is purchased. A clerk enters the title, size, date and place of publication in a large "accession book." The cataloguer makes a transcript of this entry on a card, which he places immediately in its alphabetical place in a drawer provided for the purpose. Another card, with the same title, is placed in a drawer reserved for the classification of works by subjects. Thus whenever it becomes necessary to print a supplementary catalogue, as it does every few years, a copyist has only to transcribe for the printer the contents of these drawers, and the books on the shelves need not be touched. The new book, having been entered, is now passed to a rough pine table, where the coverer stands, with piles of brown paper of different sizes, a paste-pot, and a pair of scissors. In a few seconds the book is covered, lettered, and ready to be placed on the shelves. On the other side of the room is a heap of tattered volumes waiting for repair. Every day a big basketful of them is brought in from the Library. Some need

nothing but re-covering. Others want a bit of paste. Many can only be saved by the binder. On an average every book has to be re-covered after three issues. The annual consumption of paper for this purpose is no less than 2,000 pounds. The cost of binding is about \$2,500 a year; and as this is always done in the plainest possible manner, it is evident that a great number of books must go to make up the total. The fresh paper-covered novels added to the Library—all of which are substantially bound before they are placed on the shelves—amount to about ten for every day in the year.

Before long the Mercantile Library Association will have a bindery of its own. Before long, also, if the plans of the Directors do not miscarry, it will have a handsome fire-proof building, with abundant shelf-room, and abundant facilities of all kinds for doing its own work under its own roof. At the present rate of increase it will soon be the largest library in the United States; and though it is not likely to rival in the value of its contents such magnificent foundations as that of Mr. Astor, it will always be a monument to the good sense of the young men of New York, and a public benefit for which the whole community will have reason to be thankful.

---